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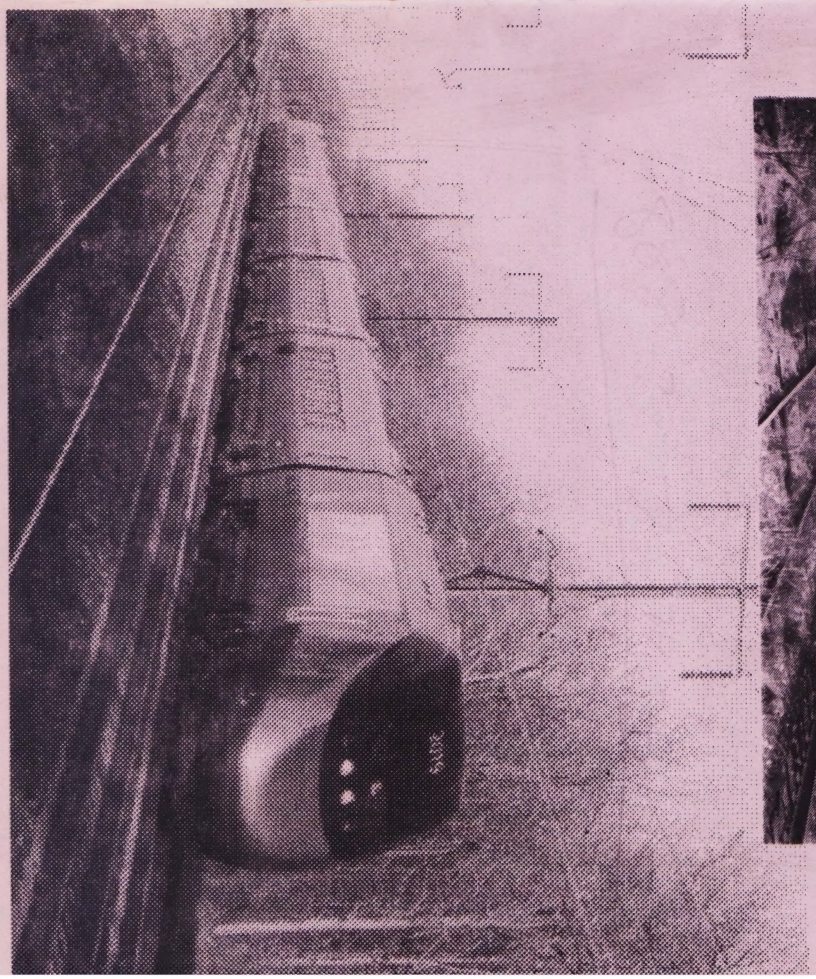

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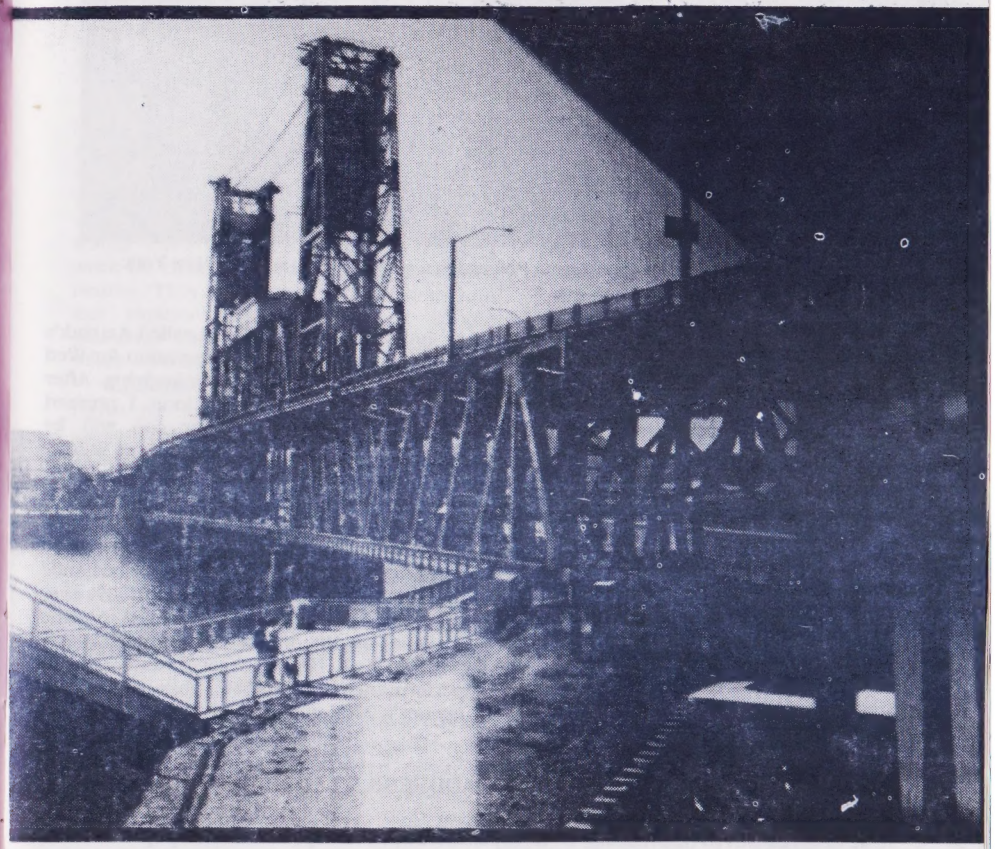
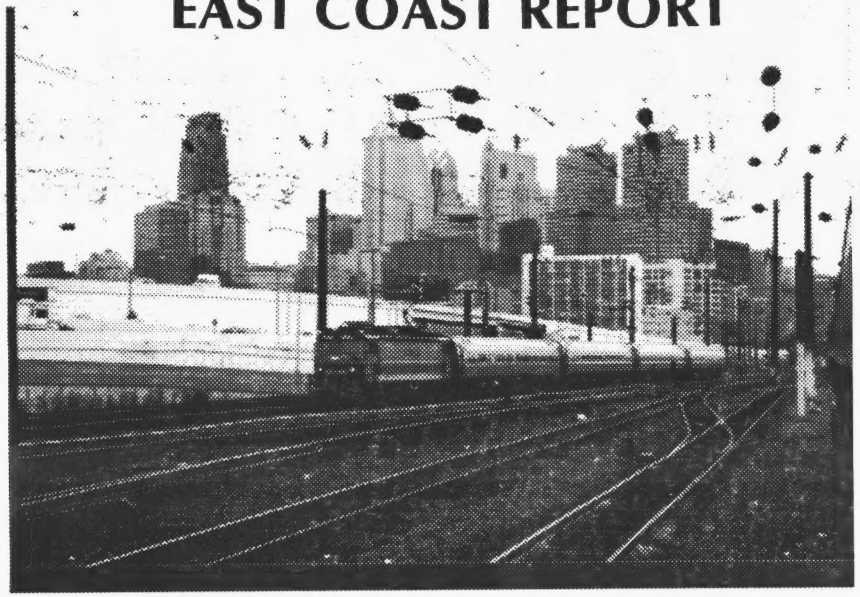


- RIDING PACIFIC NORTHWEST TRAINS
- FALL NARP BOARD MEETING REPORT
- GEARING UP FOR HOLIDAY TRAVEL
- ARC'S ATTACK ON AMTRAK

EAST COAST REPORT



An Amtrak Keystone Service train leaves Philadelphia on Aug 18, headed for New York. Photo by Bill Hakkarinen.

Metro-North once again this year issued special Thanksgiving weekend timetables for its three lines, the Hudson, Harlem and New Haven. Plenty of morning service was listed in the timetables for travelers wanting to see the Macy's Thanksgiving parade. Also, on Friday Nov 23, the day after Thanksgiving, all train service was offered at low off-peak fares.

In the Oct 28 New Haven Line timetable, Saturday-only super express train 3619, leaving New Haven at 9:30am and making one stop in Bridgeport, was shown as arriving at Grand Central at 10:27. I fear this arrival time is incorrect, as in the Thanksgiving timetable the train has a GCT arrival time of 10:57.

On Sat, Nov 17 at 3pm I called Amtrak's 800 number for a train reservation for Wed the 21st, the day before Thanksgiving. After listening to the various options, I pressed "0" for a sales rep. "Your call will be answered in the order received" was followed by two rings and an agent speaking. In four minutes I had my reservation and was off the phone. I never got to hear any of the "hold music".—Bob Underwood.

Metro-North's on-time performance for the week ended Nov 18 was 95.5% system-wide. By line, it was 97.1% on the Hudson, 96.1% on the Harlem and 94.1% on the New Haven. Year-to-date system performance was 96.5%, while the transit agency's 2001 goal is 97.2%.

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ON THE COVER

The southbound *Coast Starlight* may be barely visible in this photo as it rumbles across the Steel Bridge across the Willamette River in Portland OR. The steel bridge carries Amtrak and freight trains, highway traffic and Portland's MAX light rail trains. Oct 20 photo by Gene Poon. In this issue, Mr. Poon reports on an October trip from California to the Pacific Northwest and back.

PATH officials took media representatives on a tour of the destroyed train station below the collapsed World Trade Center buildings on Nov 14. The train with the two crushed cars is, of course, still there. The damage in the rest of the station is variable with some stores still sitting with delicate merchandise intact in the midst of other destruction. Escalators were said to be demolished, but turnstiles intact.

Engineers have been trying their best to study the area for some weeks, to determine how best to rebuild. They figure that train service could be restored within two years. New entrance and exit locations would be established, and the platform would have to operate while continuing work on cleanup and rebuilding continued nearby. They suggested that entrance and exit locations be at each end of the platform, funneling users to and from Vesey Street and Liberty Street.

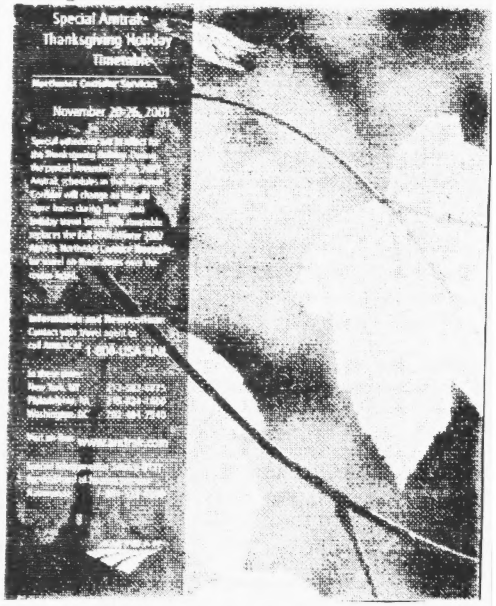
CBS news anchor Dan Rather was returning to New York from a family gathering in Austin TX the morning of Nov 12 when American Airlines flight 587 crashed just after takeoff from NY's Kennedy Airport. Rather's flight was diverted to Philadelphia, and he took an Amtrak train, the 12:43pm Metroliner from Philadelphia to NY, arriving in time to avoid missing his on-the-air report. He credited a fast Philly cab driver, working under a $100 incentive with getting him from the airport to 30th Street Station in time for his train—a distance of seven miles in 14 minutes.

An Atlanta company, Mass Transit Network International (MTNI), on Nov 14 signed a contract for exclusive rights to distribute CNN news to transit markets in the US. News display would be on large electronic screens. So far such screens have been installed in Atlanta and Cleveland on an experimental basis.

If Pittsburgh's maglev experiment wins out over its competitor in the Baltimore-Washington DC area, the Pittsburgh operation will be benefiting from a partnership newly created between it (Maglev Inc.) and CargoLifter AG, the latter a German company that will haul large building parts for the system by helium blimps.

On one of Amtrak's busiest travel days, and with NE Corridor patronage running a guesstimated 20% higher than last year's Thanksgiving week levels, on Sunday Nov 24, a CSX freight derailment in the Bronx, at its Oak Point Yard at 1:45pm tore down an Amtrak catenary pole, knocking out electric power to Amtrak trains. The incident set Amtrak trains 1.5 or more hours behind schedule and inconvenienced thousands of passengers. Amtrak used diesel power to move the affected trains while mechanical forces worked on restoring the power. They estimated that at least one track would be operating again by Monday morning.

Early reports said the derailment was at New Rochelle NY. However, the actual Bronx location is nine miles from New Rochelle. Power was off up to the phase gap outside New Rochelle, while trains switch over from Amtrak to Metro-North electrical power. The 19-mile Amtrak line from New York to New Rochelle was affected. There were no injuries reported in the freight derailment.



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(continued on page 19)

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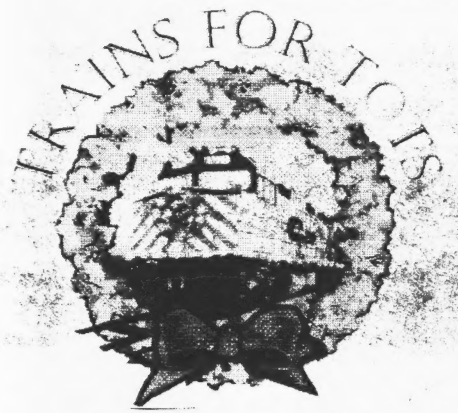

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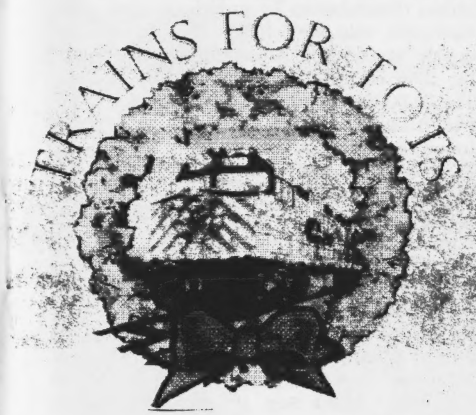

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A BART extension from Fremont to San Jose began to become a reality in late Nov as an agreement was reached between the BART board and Santa Clara's Valley Transportation Authority (VTA). The route would have been in the original system design if Santa Clara County had not opted out of BART. The county is now anxious to have it, with population much increased since the early 1970s, when BART was being built, and is willing to pay for the privilege. The county will pay most of the $3.7 billion to build the extension, and will pay operating costs and other costs. East Bay politicians got everything they wanted from VTA except that they still do not have assurances that extensions to Antioch and Livermore will be built. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission also promised that in its latest regional plan it will lump together needed projects that have funding with those that do not. State and federal funding will contribute to the costs of the extension.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported that the extension and a proposed Muni Metro subway to SF's Chinatown constitute the "centerpiece" of transit proposals that MTC will endorse and for which federal funding will be sought.

The year 2005 has been mentioned as a target date for completion of the extension.

A federal judge, ruling in a case brought against the Metropolitan Transportation Commission by environmental organizations, told MTC Nov 9 that transit ridership in the Bay Area must be increased by 15% under the federal Clean Air Act. The MTC failed to increase ridership 15% over 1982-3 levels, despite its legally binding promise to do so.

The 10th anniversary of the Capitol Corridor service will occur in Dec, and to mark the occasion, Amtrak and the Joint Powers Board will lower all regular fares by 10% during the month.

Portland's Oregonian newspaper reported in mid-Nov that Tri-Met's new MAX airport light rail line has begun using 2-car trains, in part due to closure of parking areas to reduce terrorist threats. When the line opened Sep 10, Tri-Met officials said they did not foresee the need for 2-car trains for several years, perhaps until 2007. The new route has been doing "better than expected," according to Tri-Met.

California High-Speed Rail Authority voted in mid-Nov to share Caltrain tracks after the latter builds its Baby Bullet train.

Altamont Commuter Express train 5, the last morning run to San Jose, was annulled between Livermore & Pleasanton CA after it hit a tractor-trailer rig at a grade crossing; no derailment, no injuries.

VANCOUVER ISLAND BUDD CAR SERVICE THREATENED

The days of VIA Rail Canada's Victoria to Courtenay, BC Budd-car train seem to be numbered. RailAmerica, the shortline rail company that owns and operates the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway, gave notice as of Dec 1 that in 30 days it must discontinue freight operations due to a downturn in the forestry business and a large customer changing over to truck service. The company will lay off at the end of 30 days all operating crews except those needed for the passenger train. It is required to give VIA 90 days notice before terminating the passenger train operation. The service has been rescued before, as it has strong public support, but it seems doubtful that the Budd car service would be able to absorb the full maintenance costs of the railway.

MIDWEST REPORT

Amtrak on Nov 13 sold the air rights over Chicago tracks it owns to TrizecHahn for $21 million. Up until then, Amtrak was leasing the air rights. TrizecHahn owns buildings at 10 and 120 S. Riverside that it built over the tracks. It is also the owner of the Sears Tower.

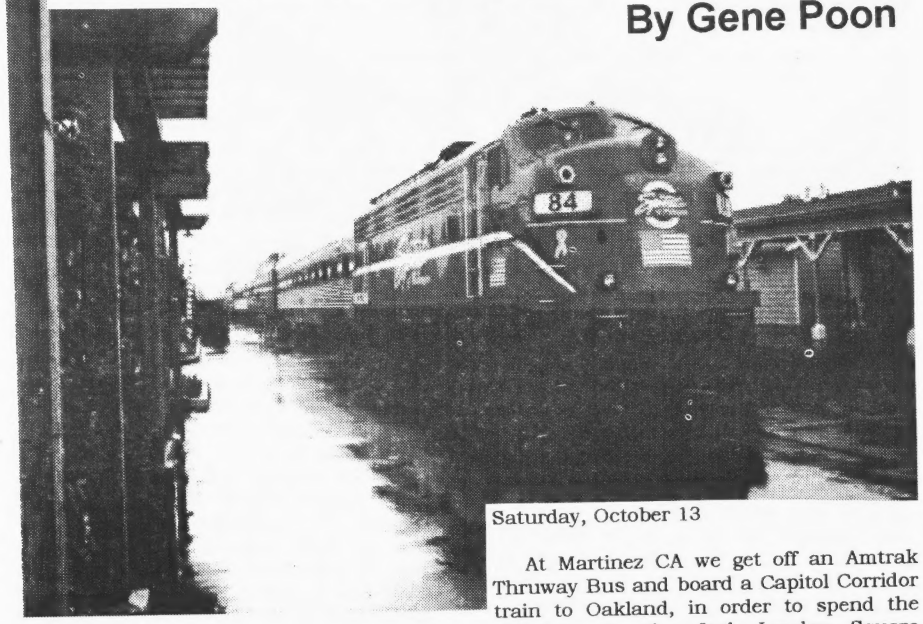
A reliable Amtrak source reported that Midwest Corridor trains received no added cars for the Thanksgiving holiday.

Returning to Louisville: After 22 years Amtrak returns to Louisville KY Dec 4 as the *Kentucky Cardinal* begins serving a new stop at Louisville Union Station. LVL is the code for the stop, and also for the Greyhound Thruway services at a different location. Amtrak hopes to change the latter code soon. The Jeffersonville IN stop will remain, but now will be called simply "Jeffersonville", not "Louisville-Jeffersonville." Train 850 will arrive at LVL at 8:15am and depart there (#851) at 8:55pm. A Golden Spike ceremony will be held Dec 4. The new station will be unstaffed.

(continued on page 21)

Rails to the Pacific Northwest

By Gene Poon



Photos by the author. Photo above shows the Spirit of Washington Dinner Train at Renton WA on Oct 16 during typically damp Seattle weather.

To me, the *Coast Starlight* holds a special place among passenger trains. Among its ancestors was the first train I ever rode, from Salem, Oregon to Portland. Only a few years later, I watched the *Starlight*'s predecessor between the Bay Area and Los Angeles, the *Coast Daylight*, in its transition from steam to diesel power. The train that became the *Coast Starlight* was the first Amtrak train I rode, at the company's inception.

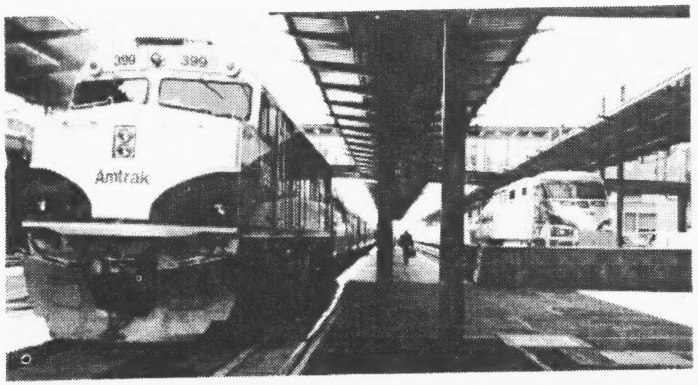
More recently, in 1995, I experienced the first trip of the "Superior Service" *Coast Starlight*, with its Pacific Parlour Car. Several more trips have followed in the intervening years. Now, especially due to the current financial crisis facing Amtrak, changes have been made to the services and amenities on board the *Starlight*, so it was time for another trip on what was once Amtrak's finest train.

For this trip, my wife and I planned a week's vacation to the Pacific Northwest, aboard the *Coast Starlight* and *Cascades*.

Saturday, October 13

At Martinez CA we get off an Amtrak Thruway Bus and board a Capitol Corridor train to Oakland, in order to spend the afternoon in the Jack London Square district before the departure of the *Coast Starlight*. It's a pleasant and sunny day. We pass a couple of hours in the block-long Barnes and Noble bookstore, but my browsing is interrupted every few minutes. Rail traffic on the Union Pacific Coast Subdivision announces itself by an unmistakable rumble inside the building, the picture window facing the street providing a splendid view of the passing trains. Most are passenger trains, *San Joaquins* and *Capitols* in the familiar Amtrak California colors. There are even more train movements than the public timetable indicates, because all *San Joaquins*, and some *Capitols* that terminate in Oakland, pass by an extra time, to or from the coach yards. It all makes for a lot of trains to watch. Later, after dinner in one of the many restaurants in the area, we sit on a bench and marvel at how the busy Saturday evening traffic mixes with the passenger trains.

In the waiting room of Amtrak's Oakland station, the lighting is cold and glaring. The clerks' voices echo in this hard, glass-walled space. We can hear them talking about a delay to the northbound *Starlight*: Capitol Corridor



Two *Cascades* Talgo trains on Tracks 3 and 4 at King Street Station, Seattle on Oct 20.

Train 547 has a mechanical problem, forcing the *Starlight* to wait while the *Capitol* train creeps along to a siding. After losing a half hour, our train finally arrives. As the train's headlight bathes the crowd on the platform, boarding announcements are made three times, explaining where the sleeper and coach cars will be located on the platform. As usual, a few passengers choose to ignore the announcements and wind up at the wrong end of the platform, but there is plenty of time to get aboard.

We have reservations in Superliner sleeper "Texas," line number 1430, in Bedroom B. But our attendant, Faisal, has to make up the room because its prior occupants have just vacated it. He directs us to the Parlour Car, where we settle into easy chairs and relax.

Shortly after their transfer to Amtrak West and the *Coast Starlight*, the ex-Santa Fe Hi-Level Lounges, now Pacific Parlour Cars, underwent a transformation. Rich wood paneling and quality furnishings lend a posh ambiance, replacing the 1950s-style seafoam-green painted walls and stock Amtrak upholstery. Lighting is subdued; the overall effect resembles some of the finer private railroad cars, except that the Pacific Parlour car is open to anyone who pays for a First Class Sleeping Car ticket.

If the intent of Brian Rosenwald, then manager of the *Coast Starlight*, was to sell more of those First Class Sleeping Car tickets, the Parlour Car is a success, at least on this trip. The sleeping cars will be completely full out of Sacramento. For coach passengers hoping for an onboard upgrade to a sleeper room for a bargain price, this means they will instead be riding in their seats tonight.

We are watching from the Parlour windows as the conductor gives the signal to proceed. Moments later, Faisal calls us and tells us that Bedroom B is ready. He has already made down the beds. After a brief explanation of what's where in the room, and an invitation to coffee or juice whenever we want it, he bids us goodnight.

The room is in fine condition. Readers of RTN will remember my comments about a particularly shabby Superliner Deluxe Bedroom, on a *California Zephyr* trip over a year ago. This room on the *Starlight* is its opposite. Everything works, and everything is screwed, bolted or glued down. There is not a rattle to be heard. And the room is clean, clean, perfectly clean, almost as though the car had just come from the builders'.

Besides the opportunity to visit for an afternoon, another reason for boarding in Oakland instead of Martinez was the habitual lateness of the *Starlight* along its route. When planning the trip, I figured that if the train were late at Martinez, we could be waiting for it until midnight or later. A reshuffling of the timetable in late September didn't affect the end point times, but did make changes in the schedule at intermediate points, improving the train's punctuality as a result. This *Starlight* gains time into Emeryville, the next station stop, thanks to some recovery time in the schedule. The Emeryville station stop is shortened as much as possible, so that by the time the train departs, it is almost on time. I never do find out when we go through Martinez. By then, I'm already asleep.

Sunday, October 14

The sun is peeking through patchy clouds when we awaken, somewhere near the California-Oregon border. Faisal's refreshments are ready as promised, so we spend the last few minutes into Klamath Falls, OR sipping coffee and juice. The high plains country is very different from the urban scenes of the East Bay, making it seem like we have traveled even farther than 400 rail miles from Oakland. Then the *Starlight* slows, glides past several Union Pacific freight trains in the yards, and finally stops in front of the Klamath Falls station, ten minutes early.

It is cold and brisk outside, quite a change from the near-90 degree day in Oakland. I get a look at the *Starlight*'s head end, today showing uncharacteristic variety in its unmatched set of three locomotives. A blue F59PHI "Rocketship" unit enroute to Seattle for the Cascades service is led by two P42 Genesis units in different paint schemes. The second Genesis, AMTK 21, is an Intercity unit which I've ridden behind on several occasions, the most notable being the Feb 1998 inaugural run of the California Service *Texas Eagle*.

Back in the station, the conductor is collecting tickets. The new procedure here is that nobody boards the train without a boarding pass, so a queue has formed at the door to trackside. Inside the small waiting room are a fair number of onlookers, too. In Klamath Falls, the passage of the daily train is still an important event, each morning and evening.

Exactly on time, the *Coast Starlight* eases away to continue its trip to the Pacific Northwest. It's time to go to breakfast, but the dining car is full, so the Parlour Car attendant takes our names and invites us to relax for a few minutes, and to help ourselves to Danish pastry while we wait.

The effect of Amtrak's budget crunch shows: the Parlour's amenities have indeed been cut back. In past years, a huge pile of big, flaky breakfast pastries adorned a large serving tray, which the attendant had to replenish frequently. Often, passengers would fill up on several of these goodies, and then decide to forego breakfast in the diner. Today, the pastries that we have been invited to sample are much smaller, and rather ordinary; judging from how they are being ignored, quality has suffered along with size. The former plate of fresh fruit has been replaced by a bowl of apples. Three copies of the Sunday Portland Oregonian newspaper have been placed in the car, but they are too few for the number of passengers. The attendant encourages us all to share the various sections of the newspapers with other passengers, but the newspaper situation gets worse when one ignoramus disregards the announcement by the attendant that we should leave the newspapers for others to read. He packs up an Oregonian, taking it with him when he returns to his sleeping car room.

The call for breakfast comes in about 15 minutes. We are greeted by a friendly staff, and are seated with a couple who boarded in Emeryville the night before. They ride the *Coast Starlight* several times a year to the Bay Area to attend baseball games, so are very familiar with the sights along the way. Several rugged-looking extinct volcanoes in the distance make a spectacular backdrop for the evergreen forests alongside the tracks. We hear some new riders to the *Coast Starlight*, at the table opposite ours, say that they wished they knew more about the scenic highlights along the route. In the absence of the *Coast Starlight* Route Guide, another Amtrak budget casualty, we regular riders do our best to help out.

The *Coast Starlight* Omelette is hot and savory, filled with mushrooms, onions, spinach and cheese. An order of scrambled eggs comes with crisp, delicate strips of bacon. Complementing the chef's fine entrees is an attentive waitress, whose pot of hot coffee is as bottomless as one could desire. Ours is the last breakfast seating, so we can linger a few extra minutes over that coffee, before adjourning to the Parlour Car for more scenery and pleasant company.

The Natron Cutoff route we follow through the Cascade Mountains may not be as long as the *California Zephyr*'s Donner Pass route, but it is equally scenic. The train sweeps alongside some beautiful mountain lakes featured in publicity photos of the *Starlight*'s predecessor, Southern Pacific's *Cascade*. The terrain downhill from Cascade Summit forced the builders of the line to descend the side of a mountain in three switchbacks, the train changing directions by 180 degrees inside a tunnel at the end of one switchback. Yet the gradient of the line is moderate by railroad standards. A major reason for its construction was to bypass the steep grades on the SP's older Siskiyou line through Grants Pass and Medford.

The most rugged part of the Natron Cutoff ends at the village of Oak Ridge, where the railroad, now the Union Pacific, still maintains a base for their maintenance crews. Beyond are the foothills that transition to the great valley of the Willamette River, and the city of Eugene.

If the train is running on time, lunch and dinner are served early on the northbound *Starlight* in Oregon and

The *Spirit of Washington Dinner Train* at Renton WA, on its storage track. The train has two F-9 engines, former B&O and MARC units, running push-pull to Woodinville and back. Photo Oct 16.

Washington. It seems too soon to eat, but on the advice of our dining car crew, we go to the diner before arriving in Eugene. "A lot of people get on at Eugene and come in for lunch right away," we were told. We're seated immediately and the chicken pot pies look so tempting, we order them without looking at the menu. By the time we finish, the train is racing along toward Albany and there is a waiting list for tables in the dining car.

While the train pauses for passengers and baggage at Albany, rail historians can get a glimpse of two icons in rail history. Two of the last four Alco PA passenger locomotives are in the yard at Albany, visible from the *Starlight* unless a freight train is alongside. Built for Santa Fe in the early 1950s, and sold to Delaware and Hudson in the late 1960s, they are now mere hulks, since they were stripped for parts in Mexico. They were brought back to the USA after months of negotiations, eventually to become showpieces. One, for the Smithsonian Institution, will be cosmetically restored; "stuffed and mounted," as it were. The other is to be restored to running condition, though in historically inaccurate Nickel Plate livery, to be operated by Doyle McCormick, a Union Pacific engineer well-known from his association with ex-Southern Pacific steam locomotive SP4449. With many other historic pieces of railroad equipment stored there, the yard at Albany resembles a railroad museum backshop.

The daily wine tasting party in the Pacific Parlour Car begins after the train departs from my boyhood home, Salem, OR. Three wines from Napa and Sonoma wineries are showcased, with crackers and cheese as an accompaniment. The wines are excellent. They seem to be selected as carefully now, as were the wines in the early days of the Parlour Car when a certified winemaster was the train's product line manager. The wine tasting has been a popular activity since it was instituted in 1995; today, every seat in the Parlour Car is occupied. "Enjoy...this is for YOU," says the attendant as he fills a glass.

The wine tasting ends as the train passes the giant covered wagons marking the interpretive center at the end of the Oregon Trail. From there it is a short ride into Portland. Despite a delay of 25mins waiting for a slightly late southbound *Starlight*, and several slow orders for ongoing track work, we wind onto the Steel Bridge across the Willamette River, and into Portland Union Station, nearly on time.

While the engines are fueled, I take the opportunity to walk to the head end and take a few photos. On an adjacent track, the Portland section of the *Empire Builder* is ready to follow the *Starlight* out of Portland. Inexplicably, its brand new Genesis engine has gone lame. Instead, the *Builder* will be hauled by Amtrak engine 505, the Portland switcher, as far as Spokane, where the Seattle section of the train will hopefully have some better-running power.

We're away from Portland on time, barely avoiding a delay due to ship traffic at the Columbia River swing bridge. Before the stop at "Vancouver, USA", as the conductor calls it, an announcement in the coaches warns everyone to clear personal items from any empty seats. "If you don't have anyone sitting next to you now, you probably will, in a few minutes," he warns. He's right, as a large Sunday afternoon crowd awaits the *Starlight* at Vancouver,

The unusually long station stop puts us 15mins behind, leaving at 4:39pm. Barely an hour later, we are getting ready to eat again. Always helpful, our dining car attendant at lunch warned us that the supplies were running low for dinner. "The Saturday/Sunday trip is our busiest," she explained. "If you want your choice of what you're having for dinner, come early." So we made reservations for the second seating, at 5:30pm. The call to the diner comes as the *Starlight* leaves Kelso.

One of the crew mutters on the radio, "They sure did their best to wreck us!"

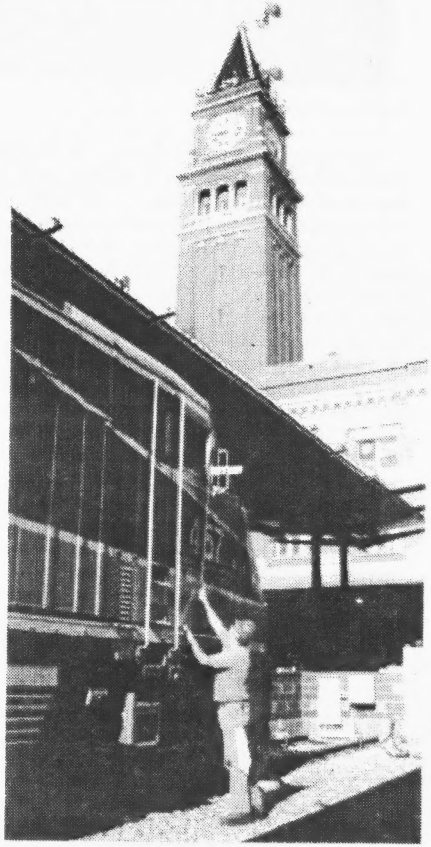
That attendant was right. The diner is running out of food. The prime rib is already all gone; the chef is preparing some steaks instead. Also gone is the salmon, which my wife was hoping to order. The last serving of the Chef's Special Pork Chops comes to our table, and for dessert, we get the last slice of Turtle Pie and the last slice of cheesecake. It's all very good, but a lot of passengers won't have much to choose from, especially Coach passengers and those who boarded at Portland or later, missing a choice of an early seating for dinner.

The train is slowing for Centralia as we return to Bedroom B. The Centralia station is undergoing a complete reconstruction, so facilities for rail passengers are somewhat makeshift for the time being. But the end result will be splendid, a fitting adjunct to the historic business district.

Sitting at a train window, watching the deepening hues at dusk over Puget Sound, is a fitting and beautiful way to end this day. It is dark by the time the *Coast Starlight* pulls into Tacoma, and then eases out beside station tracks filled with "Sounder" commuter trains, ready for the Monday morning rush hour. The *Starlight* seems poised for a routine run into Seattle and an early arrival into King St. Station. But it isn't quite going to happen that way.

What does happen is one of those unusual flukes that sometimes occur on the railroad. Nearing Tukwila, where responsibility for trains running on the BNSF main line is turned over from the Seattle Subdivision dispatcher to the Seattle Terminal dispatcher, our crew is advised they will be changing from Track 2 to Track 1 at Tukwila, due to a freight train coming toward us from Seattle on Track 2. But our Amtrak engineer and conductor seem to know more about the railroad than does the Seattle Terminal dispatcher. They advise via radio that the only way to do that is to run on Track 2 past a crossover, then back up through the crossover onto Track 1. This would be a time-consuming and potentially dangerous move, with that freight train already coming toward us at 50mph. The dispatcher takes several minutes to think about it, orders the freight train to reduce speed; then lines the switches so the freight takes the crossover to Track One, clearing the way for our *Starlight* to continue toward Seattle. One of the crew mutters on the radio, "They sure did their best to wreck us!"

The *Coast Starlight* arrives in Seattle only three minutes late.



An Amtrak maintenance worker hangs a blue-flag sign on the engine of a just-arrived *Cascades* train at Seattle's King St station on Oct 20.

Tuesday, October 16

We spend a couple of days in Seattle, just being tourists. Until Tuesday evening, our activities have nothing to do with rail transportation, except for riding the Waterfront Trolley, which runs ex-Melbourne, Australia streetcars. Then, in the early evening, we take an hour-long drive in notorious Seattle commuter traffic to Renton, where we have dinner aboard the *Spirit of Washington Dinner Train.*

This operation was started in 1988 as a one-time, Labor Day special dinner excursion out of Ellensburg, WA by the Washington Central Railroad, owners and operators of the former Northern Pacific Stampede Pass line between Tacoma and Spokane. Tickets sold out so quickly that a decision was made to keep the dinner special running each weekend, until it became too cold in the unheated cars to continue into winter. By 1989, the *Spirit of Washington* had purchased its own streamlined cars to replace the unheated antique cars leased from Canada for 1988. In 1992, the dinner train moved to Renton, operating on Burlington Northern rails, tapping the rapidly growing and increasingly upscale population in the Seattle area. With its lucrative sale of the Stampede Pass line back to BNSF, the Washington Central Railroad went out of existence, leaving the dinner train to continue operations to this day.

The *Spirit of Washington Dinner Train* uses two former B&O F-9 diesels for locomotion and an ex-Amtrak baggage car for 480-volt electric power in the passenger cars. The cars themselves, all streamlined in stainless steel, have varied backgrounds, the most unusual being a former *Crusader* round-end observation car that began its career on Reading Company rails between Philadelphia and Jersey City. A former Milwaukee Road full-length dome may have been rough riding on its home rails and after being transplanted to Canadian National; but at no more than 35mph on the dinner train, it rides just fine. Our table is in the dome of the "City of Seattle," a Pullman-built former Santa Fe dome car from the fabled *Super Chief.*

Running today with a BNSF train crew on BNSF's Woodinville Subdivision, the *Spirit of Washington* makes a trip of about 45 miles to Woodinville and return, with a stopover at the Columbia Winery in Woodinville. Dinner, brunch or lunch is served, depending on time of day. Among the scenic highlights are splendid views of Lake Washington and a passage over the 109-year old Williburton Trestle, the longest wooden railroad trestle in the Northwest.

For us the *Spirit of Washington Dinner Train* is a relaxing, three-hour evening train ride, with fine cuisine served in a gracious manner, but with a touch of the humor that is characteristic of the Pacific Northwest. Bob, our host and server, keeps things just lighthearted enough to be amusing, upbeat and definitely unstuffy. Some "Bob-isms:"

"I am often asked if we will see Bill Gates's home on this trip. Bill Gates is the richest man in the world, and does not have to live anywhere near railroad tracks..."

"The timbers (of the Williburton Trestle) had a one hundred year warranty. The company supplying them went bankrupt after six years. The hundred years are over, anyway, but the trestle is safe. We test it twice a day. The second time is on our way back to Renton..."

In October, much of the trip is in the dark, but this affords the voyeurs among us a view of some sumptuously furnished bedrooms in the large homes near the tracks. Meanwhile, the train rocks gently along the rails, and we enjoy a rich, warm Washington apple crisp and deep, dark steaming hot coffee.

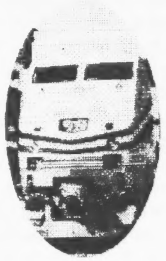
Wednesday, October 17

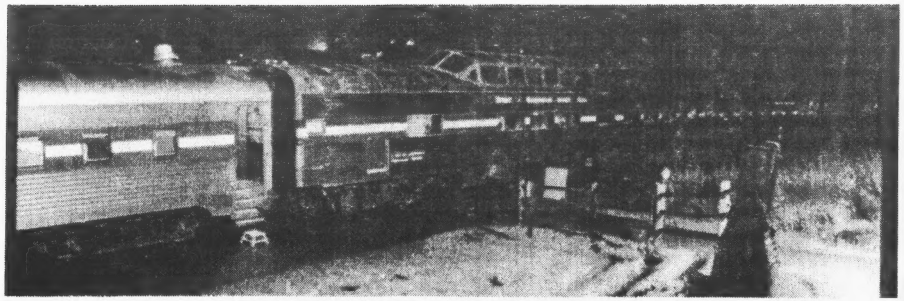
The midday departure of the Amtrak Cascades service to Portland finds us in Seattle's King Street Station. It is dreary and worn, badly in need of the restoration that is planned to take place over the next five years. By contrast, the shiny, new Talgo Cascades trains look fresh and new. While we await our departure, a Talgo train arrives from Portland, its coaches full of baseball fans coming to cheer for the Seattle Mariners as they challenge the defending World Series champion New York Yankees at nearby Safeco Field. Minutes later, another Talgo arrives from Bellingham; this one will become our Train 753.

Business Class passengers are given seat assignments when they check in at the ticket counter. We are assigned to the last car on the train, in Seats 1 and 2, single facing seats beside a big sunlit picture window. At the end of the car are today's Seattle newspaper and the Wall Street Journal; and luggage racks which, as always, are not quite big enough to hold everything that a full load of passengers will bring aboard. The seats pass the comfort test; they are considerably improved over the rather hard pseudo-reclining types on the prototype Talgo Pendular 200 train, which was tested in the mid-90s out of Seattle to Portland and Vancouver, BC.

Train 753 departs on time at 145pm. TV monitors inside the Talgo cars display the train's progress on a series of maps, using a GPS system to show our current location and our projected arrival time in Portland. Shortly after pausing at Tukwila, the Talgo on-board technician switches the map display to a movie. Headphones are

(Page 12) Almost like the old days of the "Rainbow Express", the northbound *Coast Starlight*, its three engines in three different color schemes, rounds a curve on fill, deep in the Cascade Mts of southern Oregon on Oct 14.
(Right) The southbound *Coast Starlight* is serviced during its stop in Portland OR on Oct 20.





The former Santa Fe *Super Chief* Pullman-Standard dome car, now the "City of Seattle", was running on the *Spirit of Washington Dinner Train*, seen here at Columbia Winery in Woodinville WA on Oct 16.

available for sale, or personal phones may be used. Station stops and points of scenic interest are annunciated as the train approaches them, on a banner on the lower part of the movie screen.

The Talgo's passive tilt system, which allows higher speeds in curves and greater passenger comfort, isn't noticeable unless one really looks for it, which is proof of its success. The Talgo rides well on the Seattle-Portland line where welded rail predominates. Our conductor says that problems continue on the Vancouver, BC run, where jointed rail causes a rhythmic, bucking motion due to the coupling of forty-foot rail lengths with the Talgo's approximately forty-foot wheelbase.

One problem that we do notice is that our car is almost uncomfortably warm. It's not just the sun shining into that big picture window; I notice that the other cars in the train are cooler while going to the Bistro car to redeem our Business Class ticket stubs for $3.00 each in snacks, beverages or merchandise. But the conductor says there is no space in the other Business Class car, due to the train being a near sellout. The most he can do is to report the problem to the Talgo technician, and hope the problem can be fixed during the station stop in Portland.

Except for the warm Business Class car, our ride to Portland on the Cascades Talgo is routine, uneventful and punctual. Some have commented on how "little" the short, low Talgo cars appear from the outside. Once one is inside, seated and underway, the Talgo literally becomes the "little train that could." Popular with its clientele, Talgo has spearheaded a renaissance in rail transportation in the Pacific Northwest. The only time the Talgo feels small from the inside is when we meet the on-time *Coast Starlight* and *Empire Builder*. Those tall, double-deck Superliner cars make anything else feel small!

Saturday, October 20

A few days in Portland leave us impressed with public transportation in the downtown area and in the transit corridors along the area's light rail lines. The system is so effective that we return our rental car after having it only one day. Public transit suffices for what we want to see and do.

It is time to return home on the *Coast Starlight*. We check in at the Metropolitan Lounge...soon to be renamed "First Class Lounge"...in Portland Union Station. The room is small, with barely enough seating to hold one Superliner sleeper's passengers. Clustered around the television set, fans of the undefeated University of Oregon football team cheer their Ducks against Stanford University, in a game being played along the *Starlight*'s route in Eugene. For those not watching the football game, windows afford a view of the tracks, so that unlike the windowless lounges in New York, Washington or Chicago, this one maintains a definite "railroad station" feel. While we sit back and relax with a soda, the cars of the *Empire Builder* pulls out, crosses the Steel Bridge to be turned, and returns, pointed the right direction toward Vancouver and, eventually, Chicago.

The announcement of the *Starlight*'s early arrival from Seattle is accompanied by the chugging throb of Genesis engines 118 and 120 gliding alongside the station platform. Boarding is quick and efficient, leaving plenty of time for photographs of the train, with Portland's famous Union Station clock tower as a backdrop.

Inside, Room E in car 1130, "Tennessee," is missing its wall-mounted towel ring, but is otherwise in good condition. Our attendant has opened the foldaway table next to the window and has placed a flower arrangement upon it. The effect is neat and welcoming. Like Room B on our northbound trip, this room needs no wadded-up paper cups to keep doors and

panels from rattling as the train rolls along.

Some passengers on the platform are confused by the "All-Aboard," since the obsolete timetables placed aboard the train still show a 239pm departure. At the correct 215pm, right on time, the *Starlight* is underway. We skip the wine tasting this time, instead relaxing, enjoying the scenery and taking a nap while the train makes its punctual way southward in the Willamette Valley. Early into Eugene, the *Starlight* makes a longer than normal stop, then begins its climb out of the valley and into the foothills of the Cascades. A short distance out of the Eugene station, the railroad passes the University of Oregon campus, where that Oregon-Stanford football game was being played. Dejected-looking football fans leaving the stadium are enough to tell us that the Ducks lost both the football game and their undefeated record for the season.

The *Coast Starlight* is luckier than the Oregon Ducks. It manages to barely duck trouble (!) near McCredie Springs when a preceding Union Pacific freight train has an engine failure, but is able to make it into a siding and barely past the fouling point on the siding switch. There is just enough room for the *Starlight* to pass, no more. We later learn that had we not been able to get past, the delay incurred while another freight train switched in a working engine to replace the dead one, would have exceeded three hours.

After a pleasant dinner hour shared with a bona fide passenger rail enthusiast--we have two people at our table who have ridden on every Amtrak route--we retire to our bedroom. At Klamath Falls, Union Pacific holds two southbound freight trains to let Amtrak out of town first. I fall asleep shortly thereafter, anticipating an early, on-time arrival on Sunday morning.

Sunday, October 21

Anticipation proves correct. We awaken as the *Coast Starlight* rounds the Haggin wye, connecting the former Western Pacific line with the former Southern Pacific "Cal-P" main. From Haggin it is just a couple of miles to Sacramento, where arrival is thirty minutes early.

A major inspection and servicing of the train take up twenty minutes of our stay in Sacramento. Meanwhile, on the adjacent track, Train 702, the *San Joaquin* bound for Bakersfield, boards its passengers and slides away into the predawn darkness.

The dining car won't be open until 630am; with a 635am departure and a scheduled run of 59 minutes to Martinez, there is really not enough time for a proper breakfast. So, juice and coffee from our sleeping car and some of those small Danish pastries from the Parlour Car will have to do.

The last leg of our journey is at once familiar and strange. Accustomed to riding the *Capitols* home from a day in Sacramento, I recognize the surroundings; but watching them emerge from darkness into daylight makes the scene seem a bit unreal. A spectacular sunrise, the orange globe beaming out from under a heavy layer of dark cloud, lends its share of mystery and wonder to the view from the *Coast Starlight*.

Coast Starlight

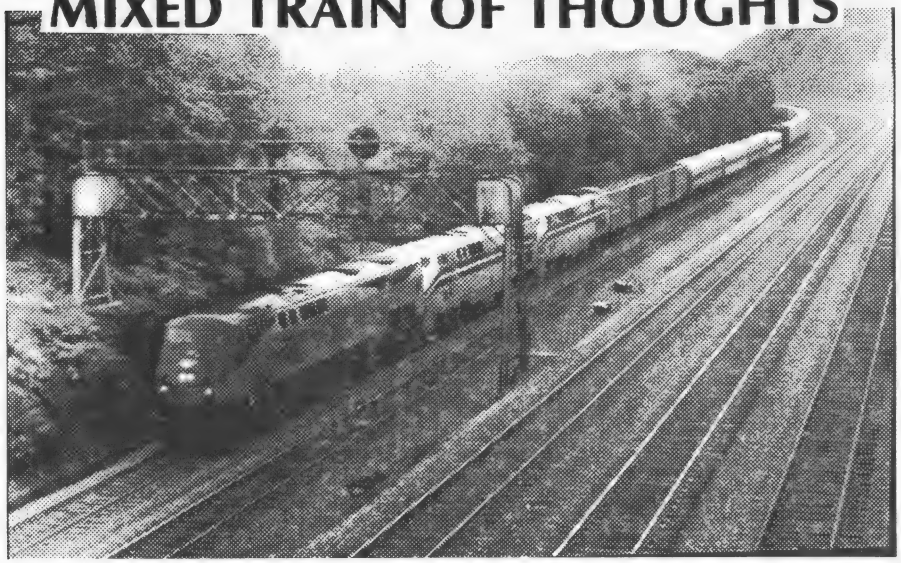
Seattle, WA — Los Angeles, CA

The routine progress of the train is broken when it slows, then stops on the Suisun Bay Bridge between Benicia and Martinez. All the signals ahead are red. Due to new track switches being cut in at the new Martinez station complex, signals all display "Stop" aspects; signal rules are suspended; and all trains are being cleared for passage by a signal foreman on the ground near the old Martinez station. After copying down and repeating multiple sets of instructions from the dispatcher in Omaha and the foreman in Martinez, the engineer finally releases the brakes and allows the big train to drift downgrade to the station. A moment of confusion arises when the crew realizes that since their last trip southbound on the *Starlight*, the tracks at the new Martinez station have had their numbers changed; the platform appears on the side opposite what had been expected. The glitch is minor, as are the few minutes' delay entering the Martinez area. It's a fitting end to an almost perfect trip.

Yes, the amenities have slipped. *Coast Starlight*-watchers say the service is slipping, too. We noted that some inconsistencies have crept into how the

sleeping car attendants are doing their job. The *Coast Starlight* General Manager's response to this is to reassign his On Board Supervisors so that they will ride the train more often, and do so for an entire trip, as was once done by the On Board Service Chiefs. Hopefully this will bring the service back to a consistently high level. The *Starlight* still has a lot going for it: the Pacific Parlour car, the ruggedly beautiful scenery along its route, and a staff of caring employees working to keep the customers satisfied with the superior service for which the train is known. With an acknowledgement to the Northeast's shiny new *Acela Express*, the *Coast Starlight* still reigns as Amtrak's finest train.

MIXED TRAIN OF THOUGHTS



The westbound *Pennsylvanian* ducks under a classic Pennsylvania Railroad signal bridge a mile west of Gallitzin PA on the former PRR main line in western Pennsylvania on June 4, 2001. Brand-new GE P42 No. 147, in the new dark blue and gray Acela paint scheme is on the lead of this train, and two older P42s in the original scheme are behind the 147. Coupled behind the diesels are two mail handling cars, followed by four passenger cars, and bringing up the rear of the train are over a dozen RoadRailers. To boost their revenue, Amtrak provides fast express and freight service between New York and Chicago, where this train is heading.—Alex Mayes.

Amtrak said in a Nov 14 press release that it was adding 75,000 seats to its trains systemwide to prepare for Thanksgiving week, Nov 20-26 (see also Quotes of the Week, p. 23). This is a 15% increase, as Amtrak expected possibly its busiest Thanksgiving week ever.

The release went on to say: "Since Sep 11, Amtrak has been operating on its highest state of security alert, and has taken measures, such as increasing police presence in stations and on board trains, stepping up inspections of all Amtrak-owned properties, and conducting security reviews of ticketed passenger manifests. Guests are reminded that photo identification is required to purchase tickets. All passengers 18 years of age and older must present a valid driver's license, passport, or other similar form of identification in order to purchase a ticket from station ticket agents, as well as when checking baggage.

"Additionally, guests boarding at any station between Washington and Boston are required to have purchased a ticket prior to boarding the train, as part of Amtrak's security measures implemented last month. On the day of travel, Amtrak recommends that guests arrive at the station a minimum of one hour before departure, especially on the peak travel days of Wed and Sun, to ensure a smooth travel experience. If possible, guests should try to travel on days other than Wed and Sun. Amtrak recommends purchasing roundtrip tickets if possible to avoid waiting in lines and limiting luggage to no more than two pieces as trains may be crowded."

Denver's RTD is starting to set a new standard in Colorado as an agency that listens to and acts on the public's requests. In Oct, bus riders spoke against planned cancellation of routes and the Board agreed to restore three of them. At its Nov 13 meeting, the Board narrowly agreed to fund a bicycle station at Denver Union Terminal, which was favored by bicyclists in preference to an alternative that had been previously worked out, reported Jon Esty.

At the Nov meeting, the Board agreed to letter and color designations for RTD's light rail system. RTD's marketing dept carefully tested these with five focus groups, one of which was composed of color-blind people. The route from Mineral Ave to 30th & Downing will be coded green and called the D Line. The route from Mineral Ave that will branch off at Colfax Ave and proceed to the Amtrak station will be coded orange and called the C Line. Other colors and letters will be used as more routes come on line.

Union Pacific Corp. on Nov 14 formally unveiled a new paint scheme for its over-the-road locomotive fleet. Both sides of this series of locos will feature a large image of the American flag across the middle of the unit. The image is set against the famous UP "Armour" yellow background that has been the dominant UP rail equipment color since 1934. The new paint scheme will be applied to all new locos and to existing ones as they take their turn through the paint shops.

The *Sunset Limited* over the years has not arrived on-time in Los Angeles very often. The on-time perf of this tri-weekly train is one of the bad jokes when it comes to talking about trains being on time.

But lately, the train has been running closer to schedule. Leaving Palm Springs the morning of Nov 14, it was only 35 mins behind schedule, but trouble lay ahead.

The trouble originated in a scheduling decision made months ago, when Amtrak and UP agreed to lengthen the train's running time, in one huge chunk between the second-to-last stop at Pomona CA and the end point, L.A. Union Station. On the timetable, the *Sunset* gets 3hrs, 47mins to go the last 32 miles between those points. That's an average of about 8.5mph.

Of course, the train doesn't really go that slow most of the time. But it usually gets very late on its way from Florida to New Orleans, and across Texas and New Mexico and Arizona, so those three hours, 47 minutes can make it seem that the train makes up a lot of time.

The morning of Nov 14, there was little time to be made up. The train was scheduled to arrive in L.A. at 8:05am, allowing a decent amount of time to wake up and get ready for detraining. Instead, it arrived at 5:32am!

Amtrak takes the passenger cars to its coach yards almost immediately after the train arrives, so they don't permit passengers to stay aboard and leave at their leisure at some time up to the scheduled 8:05 arrival. There were many disgruntled passengers, who resented having to wake up very early and leave the train at 5:30am. In a statement bordering on understatement, one Amtrak official said, "Yes, there were several complaints about the early arrival. You can't win for losing."

At least the Amtrak Satisfaction Guarantee is unconditional. One wonders how many of those guests will call for a voucher for being aroused *too* early in the morning.—Gene Poon.

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World's busiest airport, Atlanta's Hartsfield International Airport, was shut down on Nov 16 because of one man who ran back to fetch a camera case he had forgotten, running by security in the process. This single incident cost airlines millions of dollars in lost revenue and caused delays in departing and arriving flights. Thousands of passengers were moved outside the airport while a search for the unwitting offender took place. The man was arrested and may be sued. The incident also caused a temporary drop in the stock market.

The question of airport security is a very touchy one at present in the US. Congress has just passed a bill requiring that airport security guards be federal employees.

Analysts estimated that it may take at least three years for US airlines to recover from the effects of the Sep 11 terrorist attacks, compounded by the effects of the crash of American Airlines flight 587 in New York Nov 12. (That crash is thus far believed to have been a result of mechanical failure.)

Amtrak reported Nov 13 that its Washington Fruit Express rail service, initiated in mid-Sep, is helping move new crop Washington State apples and pears to the East Coast despite a truck shortage. Trucks carry many Christmas trees at this time of year, leaving less room for fruit.

The Washington Fruit Express was developed in partnership with Washington

DOT, Amtrak, ExpressTrak and Central Washington fruit producers. The Washington State legislature authorized $500,000 to its DOT to obtain refrigerated rail cars, which can be attached to Amtrak trains, mainly the *Empire Builder*. The service uses 57-foot ExpressTrak cars carrying two truckloads each. Delivery of 50 new, 78-foot Washington Fruit Express cars good for three truckloads is expected in 2002, so the number of weekly shipments can be expanded.

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People are jumpy: The *Silver Star*, train 91, was delayed 40mins at Alexandria VA Oct 30 after the assistant conductor heard a noise inside a piece of checked baggage. Amtrak and local police were summoned and plans made to detrain all passengers and crew from the train upon its arrival. Streets surrounding the Alexandria station were closed off and bomb technicians responded to the scene.

An inspection of the piece of baggage revealed a child's electronic toy that had been turned on, perhaps when jostled during loading. There was no indication as to whether it was a Tickle Me Elmo, a Furgy or some electronic game.—Gene Poon.

A pilot program is rumored under which Amtrak E60MA electric locomotives, currently in the 600-class, may be converted to AC drive using components derived from the AEM-7AC project. This is currently under consideration, with plans calling for Amtrak doing the work at Wilmington and Alstom being the contractor supplying the electronics and drive systems. Estimated cost is $2.8 million each, compared to about $6.5 million for an HHP-8.—G. Poon.

Dome cars sold: Amtrak has sold two and maybe all three of its remaining serviceable dome cars: 9302, 10030 and 10031. All are full-length domes and were in service on the *San Diegans/Surfliners* until early 2001. The 10031 remains in service until the end of 2001 on the Seattle Seahawks football specials and the extra Cascades train running for Thanksgiving weekend. It is rumored to have been sold also. The 9302 is a former Burlington car built for GN's *Empire Builder*. The other two are former GN cars. The 9302 & 10030 "Mountain View" were sold to American Orient Express.—Gene Poon.

Gearing up for the coming Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Union Pacific has prepared a Torch Car. It was to make a test run, along with UP's two Olympic diesels, on Nov 20 from Kansas City to Menoken and return. The consist of the test train was UP locomotives 2001 & 2002, UPP 207 power car, UPP 114 business car "Feather River", and UPP 2002 Torch Car.—Bill Farmer.

Bomb threats to passenger trains were more numerous in the earlier years of Amtrak, but now with terrorism on the public's mind, cranks again seem to be upping the frequency of anonymous bomb threats to trains. On Nov 27 four *Southwest Limited* trains were stopped and searched almost simultaneously after a called-in claim that one of the trains had a bomb aboard it. Trains were searched near La Junta CO, Bosworth MO, Gallum NM and in Los Angeles. The L.A. train had not yet left the station. Passengers aboard were detrained while the trains were examined, except for the La Junta train, whose guests were kept aboard during the search. No bombs were found.

MBNA America Bank has teamed up with Amtrak to offer an Amtrak Guest Rewards credit card. The card user earns points with purchases, and they can be redeemed for Amtrak travel.

A national program called Veterans Advantage, launched a year ago, is partnering with Amtrak to offer 50% savings nationwide on Amtrak fares for US Veterans, Reservists, National Guard and Active Duty personnel.

Environmental tests for evidence of anthrax bacteria were, as a precaution, made at seven Amtrak mail-handling facilities the week of Oct 29. The locations were chosen because they may have handled mail from one of several USPS facilties that had tested positive for anthrax presence.

The locations were: Mail & Express facilities at NY Mail Dock (the "Diagonal"), Philadelphia Mail Dock (Track 1, 30th St Station), Washington Mail Dock (Ivy City), and mailrooms at Penn Station NY, 30th St Station Philadelphia, 60 Massachusetts Ave Washington DC, and 10 G St. Washington. Tests all showed no contamination.

***Empire Builder* detour:** On Nov 14 trains 8/28 detoured on the BNSF between Minneapolis and Chicago, missing all stops in between, on the final day of track work on the route by the CP Railroad. Two to three hours were expected to be added to the eastbound trip for those on the train and not on a substitute bus, which would be provided at intermediate stops.

Tucson, Arizona saw the official start of renovation of its 1941 downtown train station in a ceremony Nov 1. The $6.2 million project will take 18 months.

Amtrak Intercity Endpoint On-Time Performance, October 2001:

Carolina Service	40.0%
Silver Service	34.4%
Atlantic Coast Total	36.7%
Auto Train	65.0%
Capitol Limited	33.3%
Cardinal	8.0%
Kentucky Cardinal	51.7%
Lake Shore Limited	62.5%
Pennsylvanian	63.3%
Three Rivers	70.0%
Eastern Service Total	54.0%
City of New Orleans	65.0%
Crescent	63.3%
Gulf Coast Total	64.2%
Hiawatha	99.1%
Illinois/Missouri Corrs	65.4%
Michigan Corridors	26.3%
Midwest Corridor Total	65.7%
Heartland Flyer	26.7%
Sunset East of N.O.	46.7%
Sunset West of N.O.	12.0%
Texas Eagle	7.3%
SW Service Total	19.4%
California Zephyr	45.0%
Empire Builder	90.1%
Southwest Chief	46.7%
Western Service Total	68.3%
Intercity Total	56.5%
Independently Compiled Non-Intercity Train:	
Coast Starlight	66.1%

Amtrak Intercity's endpoint on-time performance was just over 56% in October. No trains suffered with a zero on-time record. The *Texas Eagle* made 4 trips on time in the last week of Oct, aided by the hour gained at the change to Standard Time. The *Empire Builder* was the most punctual longhaul, bar none, at 90%. *Hiawathas* missed a 100% record due to a failed Genesis engine on train 332 Oct 24. Michigan Corridor trains were poor timekeepers. Bad weather in late Oct dropped the *Three Rivers'* and *Pennsylvanian's* statistics; early in the month they were above 80%. Out West, and not an Intercity train, the *Coast Starlight* made a major improvement after a schedule adjustment Sep 30.—Gene Poon.

Bombardier filed a $200 million lawsuit against Amtrak Nov 8, saying that delays in getting Acela trains built were the fault of Amtrak and its aging infrastructure. Amtrak in response strongly rejected Bombardier's arguments.

In a statement released on the same date, Amtrak said that "The Consortium's record of failure—including design, subcontractor oversight, production, and compliance with Buy America requirements—is staggering. Under terms of the contract signed in 1996, Amtrak has asserted or reserved its right to assert claims in excess of $250 million resulting from [these problems]."

Amtrak criticized the report of the Amtrak Reform Council, saying that the panel is proposing "a new federal bureaucracy" to manage rail passenger service.

AMTRAK REFORM COUNCIL
(continued from page 4)

NARP believes that the ground under the US transportation establishment has shifted fundamentally—and favorably towards rail—as a result of September 11.

- In the past two months, we have seen unprecedented editorial support for passenger rail and for Amtrak.
- In October, ridership on Acela Express and Metroliners in the NE Corridor was 43% above a year ago and revenue growth was substantially greater. Ridership was 11% above plan. Sleeping-car occupancy rates and revenues on most routes were stronger than a year ago. Amtrak's share of the total travel market likely rose, since airlines in Oct reported a 65% occupancy rate (down from a year ago) on flight schedules that most carriers had cut 20%.
- Yesterday, the Senate Finance Committee approved a tax stimulus package that includes a 3-year, $7 billion version of the High Speed Rail Investment Act, plus $2 billion for a new railroad tunnel under the Hudson River.

Like Amtrak, we are unaware that the Council's action reflected its statutory mandate to account for "acts of God, national emergencies, and other events beyond the reasonable control for Amtrak."

The fundamental problem facing passenger rail is inadequate public funding in general, and—in particular—the lack of a federal program for partnering with states on improving tracks, which would in turn improve the economic performance of trains (including long-distance trains) running on the various federally designated high speed corridors. We do not see an Amtrak reorganization as likely to solve that problem.

Enactment of the High Speed Rail Investment Act and adequate annual appropriations for Amtrak are critical if the US is to get the balanced transportation system we need to face the challenges of the new century. [end of NARP statement]

Westbound *California Zephyr*, train 5 left Denver Nov 23, the day after Thanksgiving, at 9:15am. The 15-min delay in getting underway was due to the volume of passenger travel, with a large group of red-clad Nebraska football fans alighting for the day's game against U of Colo., and an equally big crowd of post-Thanksgiving travelers boarding. Coaches were sold out. The train's consist was: engines 188, 66 & 136; cars 1251 baggage, 39045 transition slpr-dorm, sleepers 32005 & 32064, diner 38028, lounge 33025, coaches 31591, 34039 & 34012, express cars 70032, 70014, 71108, 71138, 71155 & 70044, and RoadRailer 460003. One other express car from the east was dropped off with mail in Denver.—Bob Rynerson.

RAIL FANTRIPS

[illegible] City of New Orleans, Chicago-Napa, Iberville Suites Hotel in New Orleans. Train check. Slpr extra. Cost TBA. 20th Century RR Club, Suite 902 329 W18th St, Chicago IL 60616. Phone 312-829-4500. www.20thcentury.org.

Jan 5, 2002: Edaville RR Winter Photo Special. Van pickup at Plymouth Station; reach Plymouth on your own or MBTA com-muter rail. $25. Steam loco 21, 2-ft gauge. Mass. Bay RR Enthusiasts, 27 Beale St, Dorchester MA 02124-4801.

May 24-Jun 4, 2002: Ultimate World War II Tour, Normandy-Berchtesgaden; 4d steam train built during 3rd Reich; 1st Class cars. Also tours of towns. Land pkg $2198 ea double-occ. History Express, 101 Churn Rd Bozeman MT, 59715. history-express.com.

Send large SASE to addresses. One listing in RTN is free. It must give specific dates of operation. Write: Rail Travel News, Box 9007, Berkeley CA or E-mail to rtn@trainweb.com.

CARS & CONSISTS

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***Lake Cities,** train 355, Dearborn MI Nov 22: engine 33 (P42); cars 53000 dinette, 54521 (ex-54021), 54000, 54542 (ex-54042) & 54538 coaches, 90219 control cab F40.—George Danchisen.

***Vermonter,** train 56, New Haven CT Oct 5: engine 940 (AEM-7) off, engine 8?? (P40)on; cars 44799, 44671, 82508, 82501 48151 "Food Service Car", Vermonter baggage car 1801; engine 806 (P40) on. Train 20mins late, delayed by 1:40-late train 172 ahead, which had an AEM-7 towing a dead HHP8 loco with pantographs down plus 8 cars.

***Amtrak train 145,** New Haven CT Oct 5: engines 826 & 816 (back to back) & 244 (F40) off; engine 9?? (AEM-7) on; cars 82065, 21926 Custom, 28307 dinette, 82053, 82069, 21251, 82019 & 82006. Train on time.—Bob Underwood.

***Acela Express,** train 2107, Washington DC Oct 4: (set #11) power car 2036, end car business class 3414, business coach 3530, café/bistro 3316, business coaches 3531 & 3532, first class end coach 3210, power car 2017. Same, train 2154, Wilmington DE Oct 4: (set #14) power car 2010, end car business class 3418, business coach 3527, café/bistro 3317, business coaches 3536 & 3525, first class end coach 3208, power car 2015. Same: testing at Philadelphia Race St. Center Oct 4: (sets 2, 19 & 20) only power cars visible: 2001, 2021 & 2029. Not sure if 2001 had been delivered for testing, as its trainset was reported as returned to the factory for retrofit and had geometry test car 10003 in place of a first class end car in the consist when originally delivered in 1999.—James Langan.

***Heartland Flyer,** train 821, Oklahoma City OK, Oct 21: cab control F40 unit 90208, Hi-level coach 39957, Superliner coach 35009 with lower-level snack bar, Hi-level coach 39953, engine 54. Train ran in push mode entire distance from Oklahoma City to Ft. Worth except when backing into the Ft. Worth station.—Robert Abraham.

MIDWEST REPORT (continued from page 6)

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ACELA AND HHP8 EQUIPMENT NOTES by Jim Langan

The *Acela Express* sets: Set #19 was delivered and placed in testing by Sep 1, out of Philadelphia, and set #20 followed on Oct 4, leaving only sets #1-4 still to come. Despite various reports on set #2, which has geometry car 10003 replacing an end first-class coach, being returned to the builder for retrofit, I personally saw this set on Oct 4 and again on Oct 6 at Philadelphia, but was unable to see the cars behind power car 2001. I believe this set never returned yet, and during a lengthy period over the last five months of its absence from Philadelphia, it was probably at one of the three new HST maintenance centers (Ivy City, Sunnyside or Southampton), either inside or hidden from view. For the records, set #18 was accepted Oct 8, and the following are the consists for #18-20:

#18: power car 2025, 1st Cl end car 3201, bus. cars 3521, 3501, café 3311, bus. 3505, bus. end car 3404, power car 2023. #19: power 2024, 1st Cl end 3202, bus. 3512, 3517, café 3309, bus. 3513, bus. end 3406, power 2021. #20: power 2029, 1st Cl end 3203, bus. 3502, 3503, café 3310, bus. 3523, bus. end 3403, power 2026.

Now some interesting notes on these sets: Originally testing in set #1, business coaches 3502, 3503 & 3505 are now in sets 20, 20 & 18 respectively, and originally testing in set #3, business coaches 3512, 3513 & 3517, end 3403 and 1st-cl end 3203 are now in sets 19, 19, 19, 20 & 20 respectively. It will be interesting to see how sets 1-4 will finally appear. I expect #4 will be the next for testing, since it was the only one, of all four, to have its cars in the correct sequence, and returned for retrofit in mid-May. Set #2 will probably be the last. Delivery to acceptance has been usually two months recently, so expect set #19 and maybe set #20 in service for the Dec 9 timetable change.

The HHP-8s: With the acceptance of #651 on Sep 5 and #652 on Oct 15, all are now in service, pretty much on the surviving Metroliners and Regionals to and from Boston. The remaining E60s soldier on, while they allow AEM-7s shop time for upgrading to ACs. The ACs are up to 16 and a 17th may have been completed by now. The last shop list I saw had 929, 917, 921, 938 & 941 as of Aug 1, which leave only nine more under the original contract for 30. I should mention that my latest copy of Metropolitan Div. Bulletin Order (#7-26, effective Oct 22) adds MARC HHP-8s #4910 to 4915 to the Engines & Equipment maximum speeds listing with the same authorizations as Amtrak's, up to 125mph with train. These six were originally Amtrak's option to their order of 15, but they could not exercise it without additional funding guaranteed by Congress. Amtrak also has an option on 22 more AEM-7 AC conversions, so it remains to be seen whether they get funding for them.

The same bulletin order stated that two CPs [mileposts] operated remotely from Hudson tower in Harrison NJ have been reassigned to the Section A Dispatcher at NY control. They are CP-Portal and CP-Swift in the Meadowlands, including the new Secaucus Connection station, a scheduled opening late last year. Hudson will now be handling only the NJT Waterfront connection to Hoboken and yard movements to the storage yards near the Maintenance center. This leaves only Dock tower at the east end of Newark Penn Station and Union tower controlling the NJT-North Jersey Coast connection and the six-track main right-of-way to CP-Elmora in Elizabeth NJ—the last active towers on the NE Corridor main in New Jersey.

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Dec 28-31: New Orleans, *City of New Orleans*, Chicago-N.O.; Iberville Suites Hotel in French Quarter. Train back. Slpr extra. Cost TBA. 20th Century RR Club, Suite 902 329 W18th St, Chicago IL 60616. Phone 312-829-4500. www.20thcentury.org.

Jan 5, 2002: Edaville RR Winter Photo Special. Van pickup at Plymouth Station; reach Plymouth on your own or MBTA com-muter rail. $25. Steam loco 21, 2-ft gauge. Mass. Bay RR Enthusiasts, 27 Beale St, Dorchester MA 02124-4801.

May 24-Jun 2, 2002: Ultimate World War II Tour, Normandy-Berchtesgaden; 60 steam train built during 3rd Reich; 1st Class cars. Also tours of towns. Land pkg $2198 ea double-occ. History Express, 101 Churn Rd Bozeman MT, 59715. history-express.com.

Send large SASE to addresses. One listing in RTN is free. It must give specific dates of operation. Write: Rail Travel News, Box 9007, Berkeley CA or E-mail to rtn@trainweb.com.

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Now some interesting notes on these sets: Originally testing in set #1, business coaches 3502, 3503 & 3505 are now in sets 20, 20 & 18 respectively, and originally testing in set #3, business coaches 3512, 3513 & 3517, end 3403 and 1st-cl end 3203 are now in sets 19, 19, 19, 20 & 20 respectively. It will be interesting to see how sets 1-4 will finally appear. I expect #4 will be the next for testing, since it was the only one, of all four, to have its cars in the correct sequence, and returned for retrofit in mid-May. Set #2 will probably be the last. Delivery to acceptance has been usually two months recently, so expect set #19 and maybe set #20 in service for the Dec 9 timetable change.

The HHP-8s: With the acceptance of #651 on Sep 5 and #652 on Oct 15, all are now in service, pretty much on the surviving Metroliners and Regionals to and from Boston. The remaining E60s soldier on, while they allow AEM-7s shop time for upgrading to ACs. The ACs are up to 16 and a 17th may have been completed by now. The last shop list I saw had 929, 917, 921, 938 & 941 as of Aug 1, which leave only nine more under the original contract for 30. I should mention that my latest copy of Metropolitan Div. Bulletin Order (#7-26, effective Oct 22) adds MARC HHP-8s #4910 to 4915 to the Engines & Equipment maximum speeds listing with the same authorizations as Amtrak's, up to 125mph with train. These six were originally Amtrak's option to their order of 15, but they could not exercise it without additional funding guaranteed by Congress. Amtrak also has an option on 22 more AEM-7 AC conversions, so it remains to be seen whether they get funding for them.

The same bulletin order stated that two CPs [mileposts] operated remotely from Hudson tower in Harrison NJ have been reassigned to the Section A Dispatcher at NY control. They are CP-Portal and CP-Swift in the Meadowlands, including the new Secaucus Connection station, a scheduled opening late last year. Hudson will now be handling only the NJT Waterfront connection to Hoboken and yard movements to the storage yards near the Maintenance center. This leaves only Dock tower at the east end of Newark Penn Station and Union tower controlling the NJT-North Jersey Coast connection and the six-track main right-of-way to CP-Elmora in Elizabeth NJ—the last active towers on the NE Corridor main in New Jersey.

RAIL CANADA

VIA Rail, reporting on its Aug financial performance, said: "It looks like 2001 will be another great year for VIA. As of August, our year-to-date operating bottom line is running $4.4 million better than budget and $4.3 million better than last year. Although revenues are weaker than expected ($1.1 million under budget), this is more than compensated for by lower expenses, which are $5.6 million less than budget. These successes are largely the result of continued cost control and delays in operating projects.

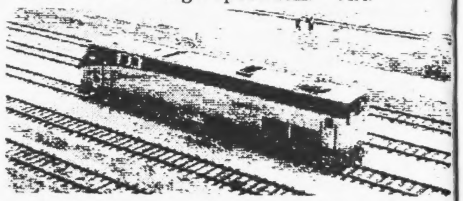
"Consistent with these overall results, at the service group level, revenues are currently under budget in two of VIA's four service groups. Southwestern Ontario lead the way with 5% higher revenues. Expenses are below budget in every service group and, as a result, the bottom line is better than budget for all groups except Eastern Services. Furthermore, we have achieved a revenue/expense ratio to date of 58%, which is right on target for this year and is one percentage point over last year.

"The on-time perf for Aug year-to-date was under budget at 84%, and 2 percentage points below target. While the Corridor services did reasonably well, VIA's two longhaul services experienced some on-time difficulty. Problems on these routes were attributed to signaling irregularities, servicing delays such as watering, and double-stops, where these longer trains must stop twice at many of the smaller stations in order to unload baggage and disembark passengers."

Ridership, year-to-date through Aug, was 1,396,841 for Corridor-East, which was down 1% from 2000; 829,237 for SW Ontario, up 2%; 161,996 for Eastern Services, down 12%, 94,455 for Western Services, down 8%; and systemwide 2,583,944 or a drop of 1%.

VIA's new chairman, Jean Pelletier, said "I'm not just interested in passenger rail, I'm passionate about its future. VIA is at a pivotal moment in its history." He went on, "Canada has recognized the value of a strong, healthy passenger rail system. The government has decided to reinvest in the system, to keep it viable for the future. It's our job to make that investment work."

Before taking over his new position recently, Mr. Pelletier was Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Jean Chretien. Earlier, as Mayor of Quebec City, he championed the return of rail to the city, and the re-opening of the restored Gare du Palais in 1985. In 1990 he served on the Ontario-Quebec Task Force on high-speed rail.—VIA.



Transport Minister David Collenette and VIA Rail Chairman Jean Pelletier on Nov 17 delivered the first of VIA's new locomotives, driving it into Toronto's Union Station (see VIA photo above), where they unveiled a $10 million, 4-year renovation of passenger rail facilities at Union Station. VIA also unveiled the look of its 139 new Renaissance passenger cars, which will expand the total passenger rail fleet by one third.

The new equipment and station project are part of the federal government's $402 million capital investment in passenger rail. The money will provide VIA with the modern equipment, tracks, signaling and facilities it needs to meet growing demand.

The new Genesis P42 loco is the first of 21 VIA has bought from GE. They will replace VIA's LRC locos and will expand service in the Quebec City-Windsor Corridor. They cost $80 million.

The 139 new Renaissance cars are coming from Alstom and are being modified and assembled by Bombardier in Canada. The $130 million investment will expand VIA's total fleet by a third and will be used in the Que-Win.Corridor & East. Canada.

The Toronto station renovations are part of a systemwide project to modernize all VIA stations. In Oct, VIA opened a new station in London, ON.—VIA

Bids will soon go out for a $300-400,000 expansion study of Ottawa's light rail system, which might go to Gatineau-Hull, Ottawa Airport, R-C Raceway, Orleans, Kanata, Arnprior and Brockville.

VIA Rail said in a Nov 22 release, "Following the events of Sep 11 and the temporary shutdown of air traffic, VIA responded to an immediate and dramatic increase in demand for passenger rail services." The first week, demand was up 40% in central and western Canada, and 70% in Atlantic.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"Preparing for what may be its busiest Thanksgiving holiday week ever, Amtrak is adding 75,000 seats to trains across its national network and encouraging travelers to purchase tickets early. The addition of available seats for the November 20-26 Thanksgiving week is a 15 percent increase over Amtrak's usual capacity.

"In the busy northeast corridor between Washington and Boston, Amtrak will operate all-reserved trains in order to help assure each guest has a seat. Reserved trains will be available for all northeast corridor services with the exception of the Keystone and Clocker services. Thanksgiving is traditionally Amtrak's busiest week of the year with ridership normally increasing by approximately 30 percent as compared to other weeks in November (the day before the holiday normally experiences an 80 percent increase over a usual Wednesday)..."

—From Amtrak press release of Nov 14.

SLIP OF THE MONTH CLUB***

"The Berkeley Commute Store will be closed for the Thanksgiving weekend Nov 27-28."

—Sign in window of the (closed) Commute Store, sellers of transit tickets, in Berkeley CA on Nov 23, 2001.

(Wasn't that in the previous millennium?)

NARP BOARD MEETS IN DALLAS By Jon Esty

The National Association of RR Passengers held its fall board meeting at the beautifully restored Dallas Union Station Oct 18-20. Union Station hosts Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) light rail trains, Trinity Rail Express (TRE) commuter trains and Amtrak's *Texas Eagle*. BNSF and UP mainline freight trains also pass by the station. Mail and express cars for the *Eagle* are held on the TRE tail tracks.

The atmosphere of the gathering was somewhat restrained because of the tragic events of Sep 11, but also hopeful because of the growing recognition after the attacks by the press, public and Congress that passenger rail should be playing a more significant role in the nation's transportation system.

NARP President Alan Yorker welcomed the participants and told them that Gil Carmichael, Amtrak Reform Council Chairman, had recently asked NARP to provide suggestions to help assist the Council in coming to a decision about the future of Amtrak specifically and the future of passenger rail in general. Mr. Yorker said that NARP Western Region VP George Chilson and a small committee of board members are working on a proposal. Mr. Chilson and another small committee are also updating NARP's vision and mission statements.

Four invited speakers made presentations. Perhaps the most inspirational one was Joy Smith, General Manager of Amtrak's Southwestern Business Group, who has responsibility for the *Sunset Limited*, *Texas Eagle* and *Heartland Flyer*. Ms Smith described the trials and tribulations of the *Sunset* and *Eagle* with a reverence, belief and passion not commonly heard at Amtrak or anywhere else in corporate America for that matter. "You can feel it in your bones—rail is going to happen," she declared in describing the work and dedication of her employees and the enthusiasm Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) has for the *Eagle* and long distance rail. She spoke of her disappointment of the end of service to downtown Phoenix, but said Amtrak wants to provide a number of Thruway bus services to destinations within the Phoenix metropolitan area that will connect with *Sunset* trains at the new stop in Maricopa. She also expressed the hope that the *Heartland Flyer* could be extended to Tulsa and ultimately Kansas City and that Thruway bus services could connect Amtrak trains between Little Rock and Memphis.

NARP member and DART Community Relations Specialist, Garl Latham, gave an upbeat presentation on DART and partner TRE. He announced that TRE will begin serving downtown Fort Worth on Dec 5. Initial service will consist of a dozen weekday trips between Dallas and Fort Worth, a distance of about 34 miles. Current service extends from Dallas to Richland Hills, which is seven miles east of Fort Worth. Mr. Latham said that voters approved a bond issue last year so funds could be

used more quickly for light rail extensions to Garland and Plano. He said DART ultimately hopes to extend light rail to Terminal D at DFW Airport, adding that in 20 years DFW is going to be the "new downtown." [On Oct 20 the Dallas Morning News carried a front-page story about communities along the current DART light rail line who now want to have stations after protesting station development in their neighborhoods when light rail was being designed and constructed.]

Federal RR Administrator Allan Rutter echoed an earlier public comment by US DOT Secretary Norman Mineta that passenger rail is a valuable national asset, particularly after the country learned how vulnerable our air service is, following the Sep 11 attacks. He said that US DOT Assistant Director Michael Jackson has been appointed to complete a study and make recommendations on intercity rail to the Bush Administration by next January. Though Mr. Rutter wanted to wait for the results of this internal DOT study, he did say in regard to the upcoming TEA-21 reauthorization, "I would not be surprised if in 2003 localities would be given the flexibility to spend some money on rail." He urged rail advocates to support incremental development of passenger rail, adding "President Eisenhower would not have embarked on the Interstate Highway System if someone had told him what the whole system would have cost."

The final speaker was D.J. Mitchell, VP Passenger Operations for the BNSF. Mr. Mitchell spoke of his railroad's partnerships with government agencies who operate rail services and added he was very interested in talking with others just as long as they understood BNSF's criteria for passenger train operation over the freight railroad. The addition of passenger trains cannot degrade the existing freight service on the line. Agencies who want to operate commuter trains must understand that the railroad cannot simply give them a peak hour operating window or automatic priority over freights unless the agency is willing to negotiate track/signal improvements that would be of benefit to the BNSF and the commuter rail agency. He said agency officials, including those at RTD and C-DOT, have dramatically improved their understanding and appreciation of BNSF operating needs over the past several years. Though BNSF is willing to listen to any agency passenger rail proposal, Mr. Mitchell said that the railroad also takes the initiative to study corridor development in the territory it serves, and provides that information to states, regions and localities who may desire it.

The four regional NARP VPs were called upon to describe passenger rail developments in their sections of the country. Boston-Poretland ME service will at long last begin on Dec 15. There will be a Dec 14 inaugural for VIPs. Four trains a day each way are scheduled, but whether these trains will operate at top speeds of 60mph or 79mph is unknown, as Amtrak and the host railroad, Guilford Transportation, have not come to terms on this issue.

Members of various state associations of RR passengers (ARPs) neighboring Mississippi will be holding a meeting in Meridian MS to attempt to interest citizens of that state in forming their own ARP.

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The Capitol Corridor (Auburn-Sacramento-Oakland-San Jose) has experienced a 40% growth in ridership over the past year and is now the third busiest corridor in the Amtrak system.

Funding and a design for a new intermodal station in St. Louis has been approved. Completion date is expected to be in 2005.

The Illinois DOT is upgrading track between Joliet and Springfield for eventual Midwest high-speed rail operation.

Assorted NARP board subcommittees formed by President Yorker earlier this year are beginning their work. These groups are reviewing legislation, NARP governance policies, quality of service issues, equipment needs and proposed routes and schedules for long-distance and corridor trains. Discussion of all of these issues was very preliminary, with no decisions being made except for encouraging board and member support for any and all Congressional legislation that is directed toward the preservation and extension of the national passenger rail system

NARP provides passenger rail news updates every Friday afternoon on their Web site, www.narprail.org (click on "Hotline".)

John Esty is President of ColoRail.

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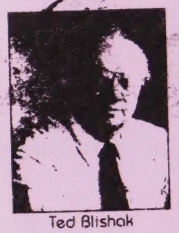

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